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SUBJECT: SLOVENIA: DESPITE OPPOSITION PROTESTS, NEW IRAQ
NTM-I DEPLOYMENT TO GO FORWARD

¶1. (U) SUMMARY. Last week leaders from the opposition parties Liberal Democracy (LDS) and Social Democrats (SD) hoped to take advantage of the slow news cycle as well as this week's scheduled deployment of Slovenia's second rotation of instructors to NATO Training Mission Iraq (NTM-I) for a quick political win. Opposition parties called for the current government to rethink its policy of support in Iraq, convene a special meeting of the Parliamentary Committee for Defense, and hold back on the scheduled deployment of new instructors. A special session was held in response to the request, but the committee rejected the demands and new instructors are scheduled to depart for Iraq later this week.
END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) On August 7 members of parliament from the opposition LDS and SD parties demanded that Tone Anderlic, the Head of the Parliamentary Defense Committee and an opposition LDS leader, call an urgent session of that body to discuss the decision to send a new rotation of Slovene military instructors to the NATO Training Mission Iraq (NTM-I). Opposition leaders requested that the cabinet reconsider the presence of Slovenian soldiers in Iraq and reverse its decision to send a second rotation of military instructors, stating that Iraq is too dangerous, the current situation has all the characteristics of a civil war, and that Slovenian participation in something that is not a classic peacekeeping operation is not appropriate. The opposition called, at the very least, for the government to seek parliamentary approval for the mission.

¶3. (U) The special Defense Committee session was held August 11 and included representatives of the government, Defense Minister Karl Erjavec and MFA State Secretary Bozo Cerar. Erjavec and Cerar made the case that the situation in Iraq is critical but has improved since the first rotation of Slovenian instructors arrived in February 2006, that Iraq has formed a government, and that there is no reason for Slovenia to withdraw its instructors. Deputies from coalition parties supported arguments of the GoS and agreed that there is positive progress on Iraq.

¶4. (U) The committee voted unanimously to urge the government to submit regular (monthly) reports to parliament and the committee on the activities, experiences, and possible security challenges of soldiers in the Slovene Mission and the overall situation in Iraq. The group of four instructors - who are instructing local security forces for NTM-I - are set to relieve Slovenia's first set of instructors deployed on February 24, 2006.

15. (U) COMMENT. The move by the opposition parties was a quick political jab, likely intended to force the current Jansa government to once again defend its somewhat controversial decision to send troops to Iraq. The story has received daily coverage in the media over the past week, a traditional slow news time in Slovenia, but the debate has been largely focused on reiterating arguments made in during the initial GoS commitment of troops in Spring 2006.
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